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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/TURKEY/EU: ERDOGAN GETS PRAISE BUT NO PROMISES

Classified By: DCM DANIEL R. RUSSEL, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: As expected, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's June 16 visit to the Netherlands focused heavily on Turkey's EU accession bid. Dutch Prime Minister Balkenende publicly and privately praised Turkey's reform efforts to date and assured Erdogan that negotiations on accession would be fair and transparent during the Dutch EU Presidency. Balkenende would not anticipate the results of the EU Commission's October report, but asserted that no new conditions would be placed on Turkey. The Dutch described the chemistry between Balkenende and Erdogan as much improved since their previous meeting in 2002. End Summary.

12. (U) Dutch and Turkish Embassy interlocutors characterized Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's June 16 visit to the Netherlands as a positive, but limited, step on Turkey's road to EU accession. Speaking at a joint press conference following his discussions with Erdogan, Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende said he was pleased with Turkey's reforms over the past two years, noting in particular the decreased role of the military in Turkish politics. Balkenende stressed that negotiations on accession could begin following the presentation of the EU Commission's report on October 6 if Turkey meets the Copenhagen criteria, and stressed that negotiations during the Dutch presidency would be "careful and fair." Balkenende explicitly rejected the introduction of any new demands on Turkey, but noted (in response to a question) that the observance of freedom of religion in Turkey remained a point of concern and attention for EU members. For his part, PM Erdogan stressed Turkey's progress in completing and implementing reforms required by the EU, although he pointedly observed that the new EU members had not yet implemented all required EU legislation.

13. (C) Rob Swartbol, Balkenende's principal foreign policy advisor, told Ambassador Sobel on June 17 that the atmosphere of the Prime Ministers' meeting (lasting one and one half hours) had been very positive. Without making any promises, he said, Balkenende had made clear that the Dutch would take Turkey's progress on reforms into account when guiding EU accession discussions during the Dutch EU presidency. Erdogan, according to Swartbol, appeared satisfied with this approach and did not push back.

14. (C) Leslie D'Huy, Head of the Turkey desk at the Dutch MFA, confirmed that the personal chemistry between Erdogan and Balkenende was "much better" than during their previous meeting in 2002. She added that a key part of Balkenende's message was that Turkey should provide EU members "space" to reach their own conclusions following the October 6 Commission report. Balkenende stressed that trying to influence the decision through pressure would increase domestic resistance to Turkish EU membership in many states -- including the Netherlands -- and would therefore be counterproductive. D'Huy noted that the Turks had received this message through working-level channels prior to the visit, and that Erdogan seemed to have taken it to heart since he did not push Balkenende hard on any issue.

15. (C) According to D'Huy, Erdogan expressed concern that a negative "Impact Statement" in the EU Commission's October 6 report might negate otherwise positive assessments regarding Turkish efforts to meet the Copenhagen criteria. Balkenende would not anticipate the conclusions of the Commission report, but argued that the negotiations on accession would be transparent and that Turkish interests would be taken into account as well as those of member states.

16. (C) On Cyprus, Balkenende reportedly thanked Erdogan for his efforts with regard to the Cyprus referendum. He made clear that the Cyprus impasse would not be an issue for the EU to try to resolve during the Dutch presidency. Balkenende suggested, however, that the anticipated EU Commission's package of measures to de-isolate Northern Turkey (expected on July 10) should go a long way towards satisfying Turkey's concerns in this area.

17. (U) Erdogan's brief program in the Netherlands also included meetings with Queen Beatrix, Finance Minister/Deputy Prime Minister Zalm, and Christian Democrat (CDA) Parliamentary Floor Leader Verhagen. According to the DCM of the Turkish Embassy, the meetings with Zalm and Verhagen were useful since both -- particularly Zalm and his conservative

Liberal Party (VVD) -- remain unpersuaded regarding Turkish EU accession and could present problems for the coalition government later. Erdogan briefed Zalm and Verhagen on Turkish reforms. Erdogan also visited the University of Rotterdam where he gave a speech to a predominantly Turkish audience arguing that the large Turkish community in Europe already makes Turkey a de facto member of Europe. Erdogan was accompanied on his visit by 110 Turkish businessmen who, according to the Turkish DCM, made several useful contacts during the visit.

SOBEL